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# **TOURISM AND INTERNATIONAL BORDERS: THEMES AND ISSUES**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Political boundaries are invisible, vertical planes that transect land and airspace, and they mark the limits up to which a political entity may exercise its sovereign authority. Most international boundaries have been marked on the ground in various ways as tangible lines separating societies and political systems from their neighbors. International borders have traditionally been viewed as barriers to various forms of human interaction. In fact, one of their primary purposes typically has been to hinder the flow of goods, people, and ideas between nations for ideological and economic reasons (2, 13).

Geographers have a long tradition of interest in the formation process of political boundaries and their functions in social, political, and economic terms. Likewise, interest in tourism as a topic of research is increasing at an extraordinary rate among social scientists, and to a lesser extent among physical scientists, from many disciplines. Most researchers seek to understand the socio-cultural, economic, political, and physical environmental impacts of tourism, as well as patterns of international tourist flows. Tourism by definition entails crossing borders in one form or another, yet with few exceptions (7, 21, 22, 23), researchers have all but overlooked the relationships between political frontiers and tourism.

The purpose of this special issue of *Visions in Leisure and Business*, therefore, is to address this dearth in the academic literature by examining the relationships between tourism and international boundaries. This theme issue brings together the expertise of prominent scholars in the area of political borders. All of the contributors have conducted extensive research in various parts of the world on a diverse range of border-related subjects. Here they merge their political, cultural, and economic interests with the study of tourism.

## **BORDER AND TOURISM THEMES**

While tourism may in fact influence border landscapes, functions, and restrictions, it is borders that typically influence the functions, landscapes, and forms of tourism. Political divisions affect tourism in at least three ways (19). First, they act as barriers to travel either because the lines themselves are heavily fortified or because the home or host country has imposed heavy travel restrictions on visitors or on its citizens who desire to travel abroad. For some people borders create perceived barriers to travel, especially when a different language is spoken or when cultural values and political traditions are different on the opposite side. In this case a perceived, or functional, distance is added to destinations that lie across the border—the

space of which, for some travelers, may be greater than real distance (14).

Second, borders often function as attractions (17, 18, 20). Borderlines themselves and the way they are marked can be significant tourism objects. For instance, the border gate between Macau and China is one of Macau's most popular sites and holds a prominent place in the colony's tourism literature. The Berlin Wall was West Berlin's primary tourist attraction before 1989, and since then officials have made considerable efforts to conserve parts of it. Pieces of the wall and the old Checkpoint Charlie border station are now featured in the new Checkpoint Charlie Museum, which is one of the most popular attractions in Berlin. Other border-related attractions exist, such as the International Peace Garden on the US-Canada frontier and the Los Caminos Heritage Trail along the Rio Grande River (US-Mexico). Furthermore, certain activities tend to develop in frontier regions that appeal to many cohorts of society. Activities such as gambling, underage drinking, and prostitution develop in borderland locations when they are permitted on one side of a border but not on the other (20). Shopping too develops when prices and taxes are lower in one region than in an adjacent area, or when exchange rates between currencies become favorable for residents on one side (9).

The third influence of borders is the modification of the tourist landscape. When tourism of vice and shopping develop in the borderlands, as highlighted above, the structure of frontier urban areas changes. In some borderlands, tourism infrastructure develops adjacent to the busiest crossing points, so that foreign visitors will not have to travel far into the country for enjoyment. Zones of prostitution, for example, are common in Mexican border communities

located within easy walking distance of the United States (1, 3, 4). Along the US-Canada border, American communities which used to thrive on Canadian cross-border shopping (5, 6) are now experiencing a lull in foreign patronage. The consumer landscape that developed in the late 1980s and early 90s owing to the strong Canadian dollar, is now one of dereliction owing to the Canadian currency's decline in value, and parts of some US towns closest to the border are beginning to resemble the ghost towns of the American West. Flow of travelers is another element of the landscape of tourism that is strongly influenced by the existence of borders. Patterns of travel between Eastern and Western Europe, for example, were disrupted by the "Iron Curtain", which created a one-way stream of visitors from west to east.

The traditional role of borders as barriers is decreasing (8, 10)—a concept that is evident in the recent liberalization of international relations, such as the establishment of multinational economic communities and trade alliances, including the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreement, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (16). Although cross-border collaboration is a relatively new concept, some adjacent countries are beginning to realize that sustainable development can only be achieved through cooperation between neighbors since natural and cultural resources overlap political lines (15). Furthermore, in some parts of the world strict border formalities have been relaxed in recent years to the effect that international travel has increased dramatically to areas that were, until the 1990s, either restricted or forbidden, and people who have been denied opportunities for international travel by oppressive governments are now being allowed to travel abroad (11, 12).

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this special issue is to examine these relationships in greater detail. The authors have focused their attention on the issues and themes discussed above. Leimgruber continues his tradition of insightful work on the barrier effects of borders and their changing role into lines of integration in Western Europe. He does this by examining various levels and degrees of trans-border cooperation in tourism at four locations along the Swiss frontier.

The meanings and symbolisms of the Russia-Finland border before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union have been examined in meticulous detail by Paasi. In his own research, Raivo has contributed to the study of religious landscapes, particularly in the Karelian region of Finland and Russia. In their present contribution, Paasi and Raivo, merge their interests into a fascinating documentation of Finland's need to reinvent the cultural heritage and tourist landscapes along its eastern frontier after the border was pushed westward by the USSR at the end of World War II. They also examine contemporary changes in tourism as the border has opened up significantly in both directions since 1990.

Di Matteo's prolific research on the attractiveness of the US-Canada border for Canadian tourists has been particularly insightful from an economic perspective. His paper here expands his examination of cross-border shopping to include a comparison of the determinants of Canadian shopping in the United States and American shopping in Canada. He reveals several interesting socio-economic differences between the American and Canadian views of the international boundary.

Directly or indirectly, all three of these papers reflect elements of borders as barriers, attractions, and tourist landscape modifiers. Certainly other relationships between international boundaries and tourism exist (e.g. borders as lines of transit) which have not been examined categorically in this special edition. Such influences remain to be discovered through research efforts. It is hoped that this endeavor will provide knowledge and information that can be used by tourism and border scholars alike and will stimulate debate and additional empirical investigations into the nature of, and relations between, tourism and international frontiers.

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